

**A STUDY OF FACTORS THAT AFFECT YOUTH VIOLENCE  
AND HOMICIDE RATES**

**A THESIS**

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**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

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### A STUDY OF FACTORS THAT AFFECT YOUTH VIOLENCE AND HOMICIDE RATES

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The overall objective of this study was to present the findings of research on different factors that affect youth who commit violent acts or homicide. To attain this objective, the following variables were examined: a) family factors, including abuse, neglect and family history for violence, substance abuse, or psychiatric illness; b) social factors, including community, peers, neighborhood exposure to violence, and school, exposure to the violence in the media, and availability of guns; and c) psychological factors, including anti-social personality disorder, low self-esteem, low frustration tolerance and attention deficit disorder. A descriptive research design was used in the study. A content analysis of articles from journals, books and information provided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Offices for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention was conducted.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Adolescent violence has reached epidemic proportions. Youth are both victim and perpetrator and the severity of the violence is estimated to be about one million incidents a year.<sup>1</sup> The growth in homicides involving juvenile offenders has surpassed that of adults.<sup>2</sup> The rate of homicide among 18-24 year olds had increased 62%, and 124% among 14-17 year olds.<sup>3</sup> In 1992, over 2,200 American youths eighteen or younger were victims of murder, 73% were male and 61% were killed by someone they knew.<sup>4</sup> Although violence has grown among both blacks and whites, the situation is particularly acute in minority neighborhoods. Black males aged 15-24, while only one percent of the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup>M.A. DuPont-Morales, "Violence: Comprehension Before Intervention--Understanding and Preventing Violence (Vol. 1); Saving Youth from Violence," Public Administration Review, Vol. 55 No. 1, (1995), pp.121-124.

<sup>2</sup>Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickmond, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A National Report," Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; Washington, D.C. (1995), pp. 45-68.

<sup>3</sup>James A. Fox and Glen Pierce, "American Killers are Getting Younger," USA Today, Vol. 122 No. 2584, (1994), pp. 24-26.

<sup>4</sup>Kids Who Kill, Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania: Continental Press Publishing, (1995), p. 6.



population, constitute 15% of the victims of homicide and 19% of the perpetrators.<sup>5</sup>

There are many factors which contribute to juvenile homicide. The divisions of examination and definition are macrosocial, microsocial, psychosocial and biological. Macrosocial pertains to large social units that hold a social value concerning the prevention or escalation of violence in communities. Microsocial reflects encounters among and between individuals which might escalate to violence. Psychosocial and biological factors could aggravate or mitigate the potential for violent acts.<sup>6</sup> Within these divisions, the factors which will be examined include witnessing of violence, poverty, lack of community resources, involvement in drugs and alcohol, lack of role models, prejudice and intolerance, child abuse and neglect, low self-esteem, poor judgement, inability to deal with strong negative feelings in a constructive way, and easy access to guns.<sup>7</sup>

Many of today's youth grow up in abusive and destructive environments. They don't bond with parents or other family members, and consequently don't develop a value

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<sup>5</sup>J. Fox and G. Pierce, "American Killers are Getting Younger," pp. 24-26.

<sup>6</sup>M.A. DuPont-Morales, "Violence Comprehension before Intervention."

<sup>7</sup>Kathleen Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing: The Correlates, Causes, and Challenges of Juvenile Homicide," Stanford Law and Policy Review, Vol. 7 No. 1, (1996), pp. 43-48.

system that would prevent them from killing. In these environments of neglect and detachment, little value is placed on human life and survival becomes the focus. Many abused youth learn to vent their rage through violence and destruction.<sup>8</sup>

Changes in family structure have contributed to decreasing levels of child supervision. Single parent households, the growing number of working mothers and absence of positive male role modeling all place adolescents at greater risk of engaging in violent behaviors.<sup>9</sup>

Today's youth are also affected by the dishonesty and passive support for aggression among our political leaders. Exposure to more direct aggression and acts of violence on television and movies has been linked to the adolescent propensity for violence.<sup>10</sup>

The increase in juvenile homicides is undeniably linked to firearms. Firearms are used in most of the homicides committed by juveniles. Drugs and juvenile murder are related in two main ways. First, about 60% of those kids who kill are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs

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<sup>8</sup>Eric Lotke and Vincent Schiraldi, "An Analysis of Juvenile Homicide: Where They Occur and Effectiveness of Adult Court Intervention," National Center on Institutions and Alternatives, (1996).

<sup>9</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing."

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

at the time of their crime. Second, murders can occur in the course of drug trade.<sup>11</sup>

What to do with these young murderers is a matter of opinion and concern. Treatment may be appropriate for some, incarceration for others. Juveniles whose crime results from interpersonal family conflict may be helped with placement in treatment, psychotherapy and/or intensive supervision. Those who are deemed antisocial or characterologically disordered wind up in the justice system.<sup>12</sup>

#### Significance of the Study

Addressing juvenile violence and homicide is complicated and multi-faceted. The responsibility lies with parents, the educational system, the community and its leaders. The field of social work is involved across the board. Practitioners encounter effects of juvenile violence and homicide at every level of service in both private practice and the public sector.

By the year 2005, the number of teenagers aged 15-19 will increase by 23%, which undoubtedly will bring an additional increase in crime and other social ills associated with overpopulation of youth. The population growth will be even more pronounced among minorities. Given

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<sup>11</sup>Kids Who Kill, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

that a large number of these children often grow up in conditions of poverty, many more teenagers will be at risk in the years ahead.<sup>13</sup> Information about the nature and distribution of interpersonal violence and factors that increase risk for violent behaviors among youth is needed to design effective interventions.<sup>14</sup>

This study will examine and hopefully provide a clearer understanding of the individual and societal factors that put young people at risk for violence in order to reduce or eliminate these factors and strengthen protective factors that buffer the effects of exposure to risk. Appropriate prevention strategies and interventions will also be reviewed.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem is widespread and although data suggest that there are important differences by race and ethnicity, sex and region, violence touches many families and communities.<sup>15</sup> According to the National Center for Health Statistics, injury was the leading cause of death for youth

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<sup>13</sup>J. Fox and G. Pierce, "American Killers are Getting Younger."

<sup>14</sup>R. Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence," Educational Psychology Review, Vol. 7 No. 1, (1995).

<sup>15</sup>M. Fraser, "Aggressive Behavior in Childhood and Early Adolescence: An Ecological-Developmental Perspective on Youth Violence," Social Work, Vol. 41 No. 4, (1996), pp. 347-361.

below age 20 in 1991. In 1994, one in five murdered juveniles were known to be killed by a juvenile.<sup>16</sup>

Experts can provide no simple explanation of the causes of violent injuries and death. Kids who kill are most likely to come from dysfunctional, violent and abusive families in which there is a history of parental mental illness, criminality or substance abuse. They often have a history of behavioral problems, learning difficulties, personality disorders and poor interpersonal relationships.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, Juvenile Offenders and Victims, U.S. Dept. of Justice; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995.

<sup>17</sup>Kids Who Kill, p. 7.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Violence is a major social and health problem that affects large numbers of children and families.<sup>1</sup> This study will investigate the presence and relevance of factors which influence violent behavior from three major areas: 1) family; 2) social; and 3) psychological.

Recent research suggests that a small percentage of families account for a disproportionately large volume of violence. Early offenders are likely to come from families in which assaultive and predatory behavior runs across generations.<sup>2</sup>

The convergence of youthful impulsivity, the declining socioeconomic conditions of many families, the growing availability of handguns, and emergence of street subcultures have made adolescence a far deadlier time.<sup>3</sup> Adolescents are more inclined to resort to violence over trivial issues, such as a pair of Nikes or a leather jacket, a challenging glance or for no apparent reason at all.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>M. Fraser, "Aggressive Behavior in Childhood and Early Adolescence: An Ecological-Developmental Perspective on Youth Violence," Social Work, Vol. 41 No. 4, (1996), pp. 347-361.

<sup>2</sup>D.P. Farrington, et al., "Advancing Knowledge about the Onset of Delinquency and Crime," Advances in Clinical Psychology, Vol. 13, (1993), pp. 283-342 in M. Fraser.

<sup>3</sup>M. Fraser, p. 347.

<sup>4</sup>J. Fox and G. Pierce, "American Killers are Getting Younger," USA Today, Vol. 122 No. 2584, (1994).

On the basis of self-report and victimization data, it is not clear if youths are fighting more now than in the past. It is clear that fights are resulting more in death because of the use of firearms.<sup>5</sup> Homicide arrest rates are highest among adolescents and young adults, male and Blacks. The homicide arrest rate (FBI, 1991) for juveniles ages 10-17 was nearly twice that of adults 25 years and older (12.4 versus 7.0 per 100,000).<sup>6</sup> In 1994, one in five murdered juveniles were known to be killed by a juvenile offender.<sup>7</sup>

#### Family Factors

The family unit presents a number of issues for potential violence. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, children 10 years of age or younger who are abused or neglected by their parents are considered at high risk for violence.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps more than any other setting in the social ecology of childhood, conditions, processes and experiences in the

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<sup>5</sup>M. Rosenberg and M.A. Fenley, Violence in America: A Public Health Approach, New York: Oxford University Press, (1991).

<sup>6</sup>Richard Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence," Educational Psychology Review, Vol. 7 No. 1, (1995).

<sup>7</sup>Howard Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims," U.S. Dept. of Justice; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, (1995).

<sup>8</sup>National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action, Center for Disease Control; Atlanta, GA, 1993.

family shape the behavior of children.<sup>9</sup> Central to the sequence of events that reinforces aggression in some families is inconsistent parental supervision of children, use of harsh punishment, failure to set limits, neglect in rewarding pro-social behavior and a coercive style of parent-child interaction.<sup>10</sup> Experts agree that influences such as extreme neglect and repeated abuse in the home play the major role in molding children into criminals.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence that parenting factors may play a critical role in determining whether or not people are violent as children, and even later as adults, is one of the most replicated findings in deviance literature. Perhaps the most salient pattern derived from the extensive data linking delinquency, including youth violence, to parenting relates to the relative influence of structural versus interaction related parenting variables on violent delinquency. It speaks to the question of which imposes greater risk for violent delinquency in children, the structural environment in which we place them or the way we interact with them. The data indicated that, all-in-all, when considering the different research methods and populations employed,

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<sup>9</sup>M. Fraser, "Aggressive Behavior in Childhood and Early Adolescence."

<sup>10</sup>G.R. Patterson, et al., "An Early Starter Model for Predicting Delinquency, in Mark Fraser's *Aggressive Behavior in Childhood and Early Adolescence*.

<sup>11</sup>N. Wartik, "Why Some Kids Go Wrong," McCall's, Vol. 121, (1994), p. 98.



interaction indicators (parent-child involvement, supervision, parental rejection) tend to be more strongly associated with child conduct problems and delinquency than do structural indicators (parental abuse, parental health). In the conclusion of the report derived from her study on the comparative impact of family structure (single- versus two-parent) and family quality (abuse of children, affection, conflict, supervision), Pat VanVoorhis and associates (1988) found the following: "Bad homes, not broken homes, place youth at risk for violent delinquency."<sup>12,13</sup>

#### Abuse

Abuse is the most ugly and dramatic way that families "teach" children to be abusive to others.<sup>14</sup> Many studies have linked serious or excessive family conflict and violence to later criminal behavior. Nye (1963) found that conflict between parents is a better predictor of delinquency than is a broken home.<sup>15</sup> The home environment,

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<sup>12</sup>A. Goetting, "Violence as a Consequence of Parenting," Trends, Risks and Interventions in Lethal Violence: Proceedings of the Third Annual Spring Symposium of Homicide Research Group, (1995).

<sup>13</sup>P. VanVoorhis, et al., "The Impact of Family Structure and Quality in Delinquency," Criminology, Vol. 26, (1988).

<sup>14</sup>Deborah Prothrow-Stith, Deadly Consequences, Harper Collins; New York, (1991), pp. 152-153.

<sup>15</sup>F.I. Nye, Family Relationships and Delinquent Behavior, Wiley; New York.

family dynamics and parental stability play a major role in shaping children. Three risk factors for violence that are associated with the family constellation are: 1) poor family management practices, including the absence of clear expectations and standards for children's behavior, excessively severe or inconsistent punishment, and parental failure to monitor their children's activities, whereabouts or friends; 2) family conflict, either between parents or between parents and children, which enhances the risk for violent behavior; and 3) favorable parental attitudes and involvement in violent behavior, which increases the risk that children witnessing such displays will become violent.<sup>16</sup>

Much has been written about the association of parental brutality and homicidally aggressive behavior of the adolescent. The presence of repeated violence and abuse in the environment of many adolescent murderers led researchers to view much of the adolescents assaultive and homicidal behavior as an attempt to master the trauma he experienced by controlling and victimizing others.<sup>17</sup> There is a clear, undisputed (although empirically difficult to prove) correlation between child abuse and children who are

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<sup>16</sup>Alfred Blumstein, "Violence by Young People: Why the Deadly Nexus?," National Institute of Justice Journal, (1995), pp. 2-9.

<sup>17</sup>C. Pfeffer, "Psychiatric Hospital Treatment of Assaultive, Homicidal Children," American Journal of Psychotherapy, Vol. 2, (1980).

violently aggressive. Children who are abused and children who see their mothers and siblings abused are hurt terribly by the experience. Therapists say that as they grow, some of the most seriously abused children are driven to repeating what happened to them, inflicting pain on others as helpless as they were.<sup>18</sup>

Proponents of the structural theory of violence believe that violence breeds violence, and that the family, through acts of violence or by condoning violence, becomes the learning ground for violence.<sup>19</sup> Empirical studies have strongly suggested that family influences are pervasive in the origins and support of aggressive behavior. Virtually all studies of childhood aggression have reported robust associations between punishment and rejection by the parent and heightened aggression of the offspring. Differences in parent-child closeness, and parental support for aggressive behavior have also been consistently found between violent and non-violent youth.<sup>20</sup>

In a study of attempted homicide by eight adolescents, Easson and Steinhibler (1961) concluded that one or both

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<sup>18</sup>D. Prothrow-Stith, Deadly Consequences.

<sup>19</sup>D. Schetky, Emerging Issues in Child Psychiatry and the Law, Brunnel/Mazel Publishers; N.Y., (1985), p. 268.

<sup>20</sup>F. Earls, et al., "The Control of Violence and the Promotion of Non-Violence in Adolescents," Promoting the Health of Adolescents: New Directions for the Twenty-first Century, Oxford University Press; New York, (1983), pp. 285-304.

parents of the eight adolescents had fostered and condoned murderous assault.<sup>21</sup>

Clinical data for nine subjects who murdered consisted of detailed medical and family histories. For all nine, information was gathered about psychiatric illness history of and physical abuse from their parents. All nine of these subjects had manifested extreme violence as children and adolescents. All nine subjects had a first-degree relative who had been psychiatrically hospitalized and/or were psychotic. Of the eight for whom information on abuse was available, seven had been severely abused by one or both parents. They had also witnessed extreme violence within the household.<sup>22</sup>

An ongoing study of delinquency examined direct child maltreatment as well as more general exposure to family violence. Researchers interviewed 1,000 seventh and eighth graders and their caretakers every six months for four years. They also obtained information from child protective service agency files. Compared with youth who were not abused or neglected, a greater proportion of youth who were

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<sup>21</sup>Easson and Steinhilber, "Murderous Aggression by Children and Adolescents," Archives of General Psychiatry, Vol. 4, (1961), pp. 27-35 (from D. Lewis, et al., "Biopsychosocial Characteristics of Children Who Later Murder: A Prospective Study").

<sup>22</sup>Dorothy Otnow Lewis, et al., "Biopsychosocial Characteristics of Children Who Later Murder: A Prospective Study," American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 142, (1985), pp. 1161-1167.

substantiated victims of maltreatment before age 12 reported committing violent acts (56% versus 70%). Researchers found that 26% of abused or neglected children eventually had a juvenile arrest record compared with 17% of children who were not abused or neglected. Compared with the control group, abused or neglected children had a first arrest at a younger age and committed more offenses, placing them at higher risk to commit murder.<sup>23</sup>

Despite a decrease in the number of young Americans, reports of child abuse have greatly increased in recent years. Some severely abused victims kill because they are afraid or see no other way to deal with their rage. They want to hurt other people as badly as they have been hurt.<sup>24</sup>

An astounding number of youngsters are beaten, maimed, and molested by parents. These children become withdrawn, mistrustful, fatalistic, defensive and violent. Children who witness or experience violence in the home receive a personal endorsement of violence from someone they are supposed to love, trust and respect.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>H. Snyder and M. Sickmund, "Juvenile Offenders and Victim," p. 42.

<sup>24</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing: The Correlates, Causes and Challenges of Juvenile Homicide," Stanford Law and Policy Review, Vol. 7 No. 1, (1996), pp. 43-48.

<sup>25</sup>R. Henkoff, "Kids are Killing, Dying, Bleeding," Fortune, Vol. 126 No. 3, (1992), pp. 62-69.

## Neglect

Neglect often accompanies abuse, but it can also exist on its own, often manifesting itself as the common failure of parents to supervise their children.<sup>26</sup> Jerome Miller of the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives (1986) says that there is no question that poor bonding results in later maladjusted behavior. In every case of a child murderer studied by Miller, there was something very wrong in the family, particularly with bonding with the mother or father.<sup>27</sup>

Family-related variables consistently have been shown to be factors in the absence or presence of criminality. According to many child psychologists, if proper bonding and subsequent attachment does not occur between a child and significant others early in life, the child will develop mistrust and deep-seeded rage.<sup>28</sup>

In Hirschi's (1969) text on delinquency causation, he theorizes that the most important variable that insulates a child against delinquent behavior is the attachment to parents. Even if a family is broken by divorce or separation, the child needs to maintain attachment to one or

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<sup>26</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing."

<sup>27</sup>J. McGaha and E. Leoni, "Family Violence, Abuse and Related Family Issues of Incarcerated Delinquents with Alcoholic Parents Compared to Those with Non-Alcoholic Parents," Adolescence, Vol. 30 No. 118, (1995), pp. 473-482.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

both parents. He goes further to assert that if the child is alienated from the parent, he will not develop an adequate conscience or superego, putting him at higher risk for violence.<sup>29</sup>

Increasingly, kids are being raised in homes disrupted by divorce or economic stress. Too many emerge undersocialized and undersupervised.<sup>30</sup> For a child to thrive, his or her physical needs must be met in the context of a loving relationship with at least one parent or caregiver. In order for a child to thrive emotionally, he/she needs limit-setting and non-violent discipline nearly as much as he/she needs love. The lack of these two is disorienting and frightening to children and adolescents alike. Young children and adolescents need to know that there are parental limits. Most want their parents to save them from their own impulses. Tragic consequences may await children who lack such people in their lives.<sup>31</sup>

From the Office of Technology Assessment (1991), family factors commonly found among adolescents who commit serious violent assaults include lack of parental supervision, indifference, rejection and criminal behavior of parents. Parents of anti-social children are deficient in one or more

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<sup>29</sup>T. Hirschi, Causes of Delinquency, University of California Press; Berkeley, (1969).

<sup>30</sup>J. Fox and G. Pierce, "American Killers are Getting Younger."

<sup>31</sup>D. Prothrow-Stith, Deadly Consequences.

of the following skills: monitoring the whereabouts of the child, disciplining the child for anti-social behavior, negotiating and solving problems within the family and modeling effective pro-social survival skills.<sup>32</sup>

### Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Studies cited indicate that genetic influences on violent behavior are probably going to be the result of biological and environmental factors. The consumption of excessive alcohol during pregnancy and the use of illicit drugs and abuse of prescriptive drugs appear to increase the risk of problem behaviors and learning disabilities. Fetal alcohol syndrome presents problems of retardation, learning disabilities, and low frustration tolerance. This can lead to violent behavior not only in the family, but in the schools and community.<sup>33</sup>

It has also been documented that children in alcoholic homes are often exposed to family violence and are frequently victims of physical and psychological abuse. According to Morehouse (1984), children of alcoholic parents live in an environment beset by a bewildering array of

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<sup>32</sup>R. Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence."

<sup>33</sup>M.A. DuPont-Morales, "Violence: Comprehension Before Intervention--Understanding and Preventing Violence (Vol. 1); Saving Youth from Violence," Public Administration Review, Vol. 55 No. 1, (1995), pp.121-124.



emotional conflict, the most common being inconsistent and antagonistic behavior.<sup>34</sup>

In the alcoholic family system, parents cannot give the children the type of consistent love and nurturing necessary for proper bonding. The alcoholic is often absent, or when present, is inconsistent in his or her behavior, harsh and abusive one minute and remorseful and kind the next. The spouse is usually totally focused on the alcoholic, neglecting the children's needs. It is not uncommon for all the children in such a family to be alienated from both parents and each other, and to assume maladaptive survival roles.<sup>35</sup>

#### Psychological Factors

Research from 1975-1985 concerning homicide, including topics such as incidence, causes, and associated features, types of murder and children who murder, showed psychological influences present in a majority of the subjects. The psychological influences most frequently identified included low IQ, low frustration tolerance, impulsivity, mental illness, low self-esteem, role

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<sup>34</sup>E. Morehouse, "Working with Alcohol-Abusing Children of Alcoholics," in R. Niven (ed.) Children of Alcoholics; Rockville, MD, (1984)., pp. 27-29.

<sup>35</sup>J. McGaha and E. Leoni, "Family Violence, Abuse and Related Family Issues."

identification problems, and interpersonal relationship problems.<sup>36</sup>

### Self Esteem

The personalities of youth who kill are almost always marked by a lack of self-esteem. They typically feel insecure and do not believe they can succeed in conventional activities such as school, sports or work. They also experience inability to deal with strong, negative emotions such as anger or jealousy.<sup>37</sup>

### Learning Disabilities (Hyperactivity/Attention Deficit Disorder)

Anti-social behavior of early onset, that is, aggressiveness in grades K-3 sometimes combined with isolation or withdrawal, or sometimes combined with hyperactivity or attention-deficit disorder places the child at increased risk for violence, including homicide, during adolescence.<sup>38</sup> John Richters, Ph.D. of the National Institute of Mental Health reports, while a small proportion of kids first become violent in adolescence, those kids who are most at risk for violence are antisocial and aggressive early in childhood. They come from families with multiple

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<sup>36</sup>L.F. Lowenstein, "Homicide: A Review of Recent Research (1975-1985)," Criminologist, Vol. 13 No. 2, (1989), pp. 74-89.

<sup>37</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing."

<sup>38</sup>J. David Hawkins, "Controlling Crime Before It Happens: Risk Focused Prevention," National Institute of Justice Journal: Juvenile Homicides, (1995), pp. 10-18.

problems, instability, parent psychopathology or criminality. Such kids manifest impulsivity, inattentiveness and a difficult temperament early on. By middle school, the kids are failing, they have poor relations with peers and teachers, and they're hanging out with deviant kids.<sup>39</sup>

### Anti-Social Personality Disorder

In his book, High Risk: Children Without a Conscience (1990), Majid noted that most children who are unattached will suffer some form of psychological damage later in life and many will be diagnosed with Anti-Social Personality Disorder. He also noted that psychopaths, who were unattached and abandoned as children, are growing in numbers.<sup>40</sup>

Adolescents' narcissistic preoccupation with themselves, their appearance, and their image makes them extremely sensitive to embarrassment or verbal attack. Combined with the risk-taking tendencies of adolescents and the ready availability of knives and guns, young people have a heightened chance of responding violently to embarrassing or stressful events.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>K. Majid, High Risk: Children Without a Conscience, K.M. Productions; Denver, Colorado, (1984).

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>R. Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence."

After evaluating eight young murderers, researchers concluded that they suffered from early experiences of deprivation which resulted in underdeveloped egos and vulnerability to outbursts of violent aggression.<sup>42</sup> In 1978, a study of 10 adolescent murderers found that narcissistic disturbances, particularly an impaired capacity for self esteem regulation and underlying narcissistic rage, were related to homicidal behavior.<sup>43</sup> Extensive information was also recorded pointing to the presence of a continuum of learning deficits and neurological problems associated with youthful homicide.<sup>44</sup>

Social-cognitive deficit theories of development hold that aggressive individuals have deficiencies in social information processing, which, in turn, leads to aggression and social rejection by peers.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>S. Smith, "The Adolescent Murderer: A Psychodynamic Interpretation," Archives of General Psychiatry, Vol. 13, (1965), pp. 310-319 (in D. Lewis, et al., "Biopsychosocial Characteristics of Children Who Later Murder").

<sup>43</sup>J.B. McCarthy, "Narcissism and the Self in Homicidal Adolescents," American Journal of Psychoanalysis, Vol. 38, (1978), pp. 19-29.

<sup>44</sup>C.H. King, "The Ego and the Integration of Violence in Homicidal Youth," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. 45, (1975), pp. 134-145.

<sup>45</sup>F. Earls, et al., "The Control of Violence and the Promotion of Non-Violence in Adolescents."

## Social Factors

### Peers/School/Neighborhood

Youth violence typically occurs in a pattern of other deviant behaviors. Consider, for example, the correlated developmental pattern of aggression, school failure and deviant peer associations. When these factors operate together throughout childhood, violence is more likely to emerge in adolescence.<sup>46</sup>

As a child becomes more aggressive, he or she becomes less popular and more troublesome in school. The more trouble he or she has with teachers and friends, the more likely that he/she will turn to aggressive television for affirmation, thus establishing a vicious cycle.<sup>47</sup>

Although national records of school-related homicide are not kept, using information provided in media reports, the Center to Prevent Handgun Violence (1995) identified at least 71 persons (65 students and six school employees) who were killed at school with guns from 1986-1990. Violence in schools reflects the violence that occurs in the surrounding community, and appears to derive mainly from factors external to the schools themselves. Researchers found that among inner-city high school students, gun-related victimization occurring in schools and in transit to and

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<sup>46</sup>F. Earls, "The Control of Violence and the Promotion of Non-Violence in Adolescents."

<sup>47</sup>J. Davidson, "Menace to Society," Rolling Stone, Vol. 728, (1996), pp. 38-39.

from schools, were most strongly associated with sociodemographic factors, including exposure to violence outside of school, coming from families in which violence is tolerated as well as using or selling drugs. <sup>48</sup>

There is also evidence to suggest that the level of violence in schools is related to students' attachments to the values schools seek to promote. Violence rates in secondary schools increased with the percentages of students who did not aspire to good grades, who did not view their curricula as relevant, and who did not believe their school experiences could positively influence their lives. In addition, higher rates of student violence have been reported in schools in which students perceive signs of ineffective social control, such as undisciplined classroom and lax enforcement of school rules. It is not clear whether lack of school discipline gives permission for students to engage in violent behavior or whether high violence levels in the school create fear among administrators and teachers that undermines discipline.<sup>49</sup>

In a survey of sixth, eighth, and tenth graders in New Haven, Connecticut in 1992, 40% reported witnessing at least one violent crime in the past year. Very few inner city children in New Haven were able to avoid exposure to

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<sup>48</sup>R. Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence."

<sup>49</sup>National Center for Injury Protection and Control, The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action.

violence and almost all eighth graders knew one person who had been killed.<sup>50</sup> In a study of African American children living in a Chicago neighborhood with much violence, one third of all school age children had witnessed a homicide.<sup>51</sup>

### Exposure

According to the United States Department of Health, children 10 years of age and younger who witness violence outside of the home are considered at high risk for violent behavior.<sup>52</sup> Although there are very serious implications of the effects of exposure to violence on children and families, psychologists are just beginning to glimpse the magnitude of the problem. Mothers living in areas where the level of violence is high often teach their children to watch television lying prone and to sleep beneath the window sills to avoid random bullets that might fly through the window.<sup>53</sup> Psychologists believe that feelings of depression and hopelessness are very common in youth living

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<sup>50</sup>S. Marans and D. Cohen, "Children and Inner City Violence: Strategies for Intervention," Psychological Effects of War and Violence on Children, Hillsdale, N.J.; Erlbaum, (1993), pp.281-302.

<sup>51</sup>C.C. Bell and E.J. Jenkins, "Traumatic Stress and Children," Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved, Vol. 2, (1991), pp. 175-185.

<sup>52</sup>National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, The Prevention of Youth Violence, p. 6.

<sup>53</sup>National Commission on Children, Speaking of Kids, Washington, D.C., (1991).

in highly violent neighborhoods. These children, feeling trapped by the violence in their communities, turn to adults for support and reassurance of safety. When the adults are unable to provide such comfort, children tend to become angry and lash out. Thus, aggression becomes a coping mechanism and these children soon become violent themselves.<sup>54</sup> Children who are exposed to violence and live in violent environments are also likely to show signs of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. They may withdraw, appear depressed, have difficulty paying attention, and become aggressive.<sup>55</sup>

The high rates of exposure to violence for children growing up in some inner city neighborhoods with pervasive violence have been well documented. Evidence is accumulating that even younger children are being exposed to violence. A recent survey at a public hospital-based pediatric clinic in Boston, Massachusetts indicated that one of every ten children under the age of six reported having witnessed a stabbing or a shooting.<sup>56</sup> In another study, researchers noted that an exposure to extreme violence or

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<sup>54</sup>B. Warner and M. Weist, "Urban Youth as Witness to Violence: Beginning Assessment and Treatment Efforts," Journal of Youth and Adolescents, Vol 25, (1996), pp. 361-377.

<sup>55</sup>Joy Osofsky, "The Effects of the Exposure to Violence on Young Children," American Psychologist, Vol. 50 No. 9, (1995), pp. 782-788.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.



murder differentiated their group of juvenile murderers from a control group.<sup>57</sup>

### Violence in the Media

Experts believe that media violence plays a major role in molding children into criminals.<sup>58</sup> Adolescent deviance and increased propensity for violence are directly related to having witnessed violence. Over the last two decades, films and television broadcasts have become increasingly violent.<sup>59</sup>

The American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association have both issued reports stating that television violence causes aggression. Just how children learn from the media is the subject of competing theories. According to the simplest, the viewing of aggressive material triggers aggressive thoughts that influence subsequent actions. This theory, however, does not take into account the child's expectations and comprehension, nor does it explain the cumulative effects of watching violence.<sup>60</sup> An examination of TV's impact on the young revealed that: 1) it shows "real life" violence; 2) it

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<sup>57</sup>I.B. Sendi and P.A. Blomgren, "A Comparative Study of Predictive Criteria in the Predisposition of Homicidal Adolescents," American Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 132, (1975), pp. 197-207.

<sup>58</sup>N. Wartik, "Why Some Kids Go Wrong."

<sup>59</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing."

<sup>60</sup>J. Davidson, "Menace to Society."

is free and universally available; 3) pre-schoolers watch seven to eight hours a day; 4) low-income children spend even more time in front of the TV; and 5) it imposes vicarious experience and psychological conditioning on children at a crucial developmental learning stage.<sup>61</sup>

Movies and TV programs are saturated with gun-toting heroes and villains. A five year study by the American Psychological Association found that the average child has witnessed 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of violence on television by the time he or she has completed sixth grade. They see what happens on TV. If the hero has a problem, he shoots and shows no remorse.<sup>62</sup> Educators theorize that a child's response depends upon five variables: 1) the child's intellectual achievement; 2) social popularity; 3) identification with television characters; 4) belief in the realism of violence; and 5) amount of fantasizing about aggression.<sup>63</sup>

#### Availability of Guns

According to the Department of Justice (1994), an estimated 100,000 school children carry guns to school each day. The important role of gun availability in the increase

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<sup>61</sup>Anne R. Sommers, "Violence, Television and the Health of American Youth," New England Journal of Medicine, Vol. 295 No. 15, (1976), pp. 811-817.

<sup>62</sup>R. Henkoff, "Kids are Killing, Dying, Bleeding."

<sup>63</sup>J. Davidson, "Menace to Society."

of youth homicide cannot be overstated. A 14 year old with a gun is far more menacing than a 44 year old with the same weapon. While the teen may be untrained in using a firearm, he is more willing to pull the trigger without considering the consequences.<sup>64</sup>

Firearm homicide is the second leading cause of death among all youth, ages 15-19.<sup>65</sup> According to a 1996 report of the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention: 1) in 1990, one in 20 high school students reported carrying a firearm during the previous 30 days; 2) teenage boys are more likely to die from gunshot wounds than all natural causes combined; 3) homicide involving firearms has been the leading cause of death for black males between ages 15 and 19 since 1969, and that rate more than doubled between 1979 and 1989; 4) firearm related death is the second leading cause of injury-related death in the U.S. In California, firearm death became the number one cause of death for juveniles in 1995.<sup>66</sup>

The information on gun availability and ownership by adolescents in the U.S. is startling. The median age of first gun ownership was 12.5 years of age. Access to

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<sup>64</sup>John DeMont, "The Boy Across the Road," Maclean's, Vol. 107 No. 3, (1996), p. 37.

<sup>65</sup>R. Lowry, et al., "Adolescents At Risk for Violence."

<sup>66</sup>Eric Lotke and Vincent Schiraldi, "An Analysis of Juvenile Homicides: Where They Occur and the Effectiveness of Adult Court Intervention," National Center on Institutions and Alternatives; (1996).

firearms by adolescents is not always or even typically illegal. Laws that pertain to gun ownership vary across the U.S. In most instances, guns owned by adolescents are "legally" given as gifts from male relatives.<sup>67</sup> To many children and teens the world is a violent place. To protect themselves, children carry guns and are prepared to use them.<sup>68</sup>

The U.S. has one of the highest rates of criminal violence in the world, and firearms are implicated in a great number of these crimes. In recent years, reports of gun-toting youth in inner city schools and of violent incidents involving hand guns in school environs have created mounting concern. Given the lethality of firearms, the increased likelihood of conflict escalating into homicide when guns are present, and the strong association between availability of firearms and homicide rates, a teenager having ready access to firearms is at increased risk for violence.<sup>69</sup>

The threat of guns is a major source of concern for administrators. The use of guns is no longer solely associated with drug sales, it is part of the behavior juveniles have mimicked from adults. Some adolescents carry

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<sup>67</sup>F. Earls, et al., "The Control of Violence and the Promotion of Non-Violence in Adolescents."

<sup>68</sup>K. Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing."

<sup>69</sup>A. Blumstein, "Violence by Young People."

guns to school as a matter of personal protection, some as a means to control their environment, and others as a sign of bravado.<sup>70</sup> Absurdly easy to buy, guns have become a teenage consumer's accessory.<sup>71</sup>

From 1988 to 1992, arrests for homicides among juveniles went up 93% compared with a 16% increase among adults.<sup>72</sup> Criminologists predict that the population of young offenders will explode in the coming decade in the inner cities, where weapons are treated like household items, the lessons in cruelty usually start at home.<sup>73</sup>

#### Statement of the Hypothesis

Family factors will have a more significant effect on the presence of violence or homicidal behavior in adolescents than other factors. Social factors and psychosocial factors will have similar effects on the presence of violent or homicidal behavior in adolescents.

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<sup>70</sup>M.A. DuPont-Morales, "Violence: Comprehension Before Intervention."

<sup>71</sup>Lance Morrow, "Childhood's End," Time, Vol. 139 No. 10, (1992), pp. 22-23.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Nancy Traver, "Children Without Pity," Time, Vol. 140 No. 17, (1992), pp. 46-51.

### Definition of Terms

Murder is the most serious of crimes. It is therefore the one we most need to learn to prevent. The finding of a constellation of identifiable factors characteristic of violent youngsters before their commission of homicidal acts and the ability to differentiate them from ordinary delinquents challenges us to develop programs to recognize and treat these children.<sup>74</sup>

For the purpose of this study, the terms will be categorized and defined as follows:

#### Family Factors

- 1) Family Abuse: any mode of behavior involving the direct use of physical force against another family member.
- 2) Neglect: the failure of parents to bond with or supervise their children or to provide the child with basic needs.
- 3) Alcohol and Drug Abuse: the abuse of alcohol and/or drugs by the mother or father during and/or after pregnancy which may result in birth defects (such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) and abuse or neglect.

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<sup>74</sup>American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition; Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

### Social Factors

- 4) Peers/Schools/Neighborhoods: the environment a child grows up in has profound effects on the child's behavior; these three factors are considered together because they significantly overlap.
- 5) Exposure to Violence in the Media: children being exposed to violence and murder on TV, on the news and in the movies.
- 6) Availability of Guns: the availability of guns and children, how easy they are to obtain and how inexpensive (or free) they are.

### Psychological Factors

- 7) Low Self Esteem: a low rating of how children feel about themselves or how they view themselves and their situation in the world.
- 8) Hyperactivity/Learning Disabilities: difficulty a child experiences with being able to concentrate or complete tasks, especially in school; this often results in low frustration tolerance, poor impulse control, temper outbursts, excessive insistence that needs to be met, rejection by peers and poor self esteem.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition; Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.

- 9) **Antisocial Personality Disorder:** according to the DSM IV, a diagnosis of Antisocial Personality Disorder cannot be given to individuals under the age of 18; for the purposes of this study, the following diagnostic criteria for Conduct Disorder will be used; aggression toward people and animals, destruction of property, deceitfulness or threat and serious violation of rules.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

A content analysis of available literature was conducted. The objective of this design was to: 1) measure the number of articles that focused on family factors as they influence violence in adolescents; 2) measure the number of articles that focus on social factors as they influence violence in adolescents; 3) measure the number of articles that focused on psychological factors as they influence violence in adolescents; 4) compare the effects of the above variables on violence or homicidal behavior among adolescents.

#### Sample

The sample for this study was comprised of 50 articles from journals, books or pamphlets. The samples were divided into three categories: 1) family factors; 2) psychological factors; 3) social factors. For each factor, three specific variables were measured as follows: 1) family factors - abuse, neglect, and drug and alcohol use; 2) psychological factors - low self-esteem, anti-social personality, and learning disabilities (attention deficit disorder, hyperactivity); 3) social factors - neighborhood, school and peers, exposure to violence, and availability of guns. There were no limitations on the articles in terms of sex,

race, ethnic origin, socioeconomic background or educational level. The age group under study was 13 to 19 years of age.

#### Data Collection and Instrumentation

The data collection instrument involved a table of fifty articles that measured the existence of one or more of the variables. The books and articles were chosen based on the topic of children and violence, and children and murder.

The three variables (family, social and psychological) were each divided into three categories and each book or article was read to ascertain whether it did or did not discuss the category. Articles were given a (1) for each category discussed and a (0) for each category not discussed.

#### Data Analysis

A frequency distribution table was constructed for each of the nine variables. Each table measured the number of times each variable appeared in the articles and didn't appear in the articles, and the percentage rating for each score. Chi-square was used to determine the significance of the relationship between the nine variables. The data was coded and analyzed by the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); computer software program.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The content analysis of 50 articles on youth violence and homicide yielded a total of nine variables in three categories. These categories and variables are as follows:

1) Family factors - (a) physical abuse, (b) neglect, (c) substance abuse; 2) Social factors - (a) peers, school and neighborhood, (b) violence in the media, (c) availability of guns; 3) Psychological factors - (a) anti-social personality, (b) hyperactivity/learning disabilities, (c) low self-esteem/narcissism.

Literature was scanned and analyzed for articles listed under "children and violence" and "children and murder." The books and articles chosen each represented at least one of the nine variables being measured. It was hypothesized that family factors would show the most significance of the three major factors.

Frequency distribution was used to show the frequency and percentage of the presence of the factors in the literature. Factors were given a (1) if they were present in an article and a (0) if they were not present in an article.

TABLE 1: Frequency of Presence of Family Factors

FAMILY FACTORS	Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
ABUSE	not present	.00	34	68.0
	present	1.00	16	32.0
NEGLECT	not present	.00	35	70.0
	present	1.00	15	30.0
ALCOHOL & DRUG ABUSE	not present	.00	43	86.0
	present	1.00	7	14.0

Table 1 showed that abuse was present in 16 of 60 articles, neglect was present in 15 of 50 articles and alcohol and drug abuse was present in 7 of 50 articles. The total number of articles where Family Factors were present is 38 of 50. The total percent is 76% of the articles.

TABLE 2: Frequency of Presence of Social Factors

SOCIAL FACTORS	Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
PEERS/ NEIGHBOR- HOOD/ SCHOOL	not present	.00	39	78.0
	present	1.00	11	22.0
MEDIA EXPOSURE	not present	.00	43	86.0
	present	1.00	7	14.0
GUN AVAIL- ABILITY	not present	.00	40	80.0
	present	1.00	10	20.0

Table 2 showed that peers/school/neighborhood was present in 11 of 50 articles, media exposure was present in 7 of 50 articles, and gun availability was present in 10 of 50 articles. The total number of articles where Social Factors were present is 28 of 50. The total percent is 56% of the articles.

TABLE 3: Frequency of Presence of Psychological Factors

PSYCHO-LOGICAL FACTORS	Value Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
ANTI-SOCIAL PERSONALITY TRAITS	not present	.00	45	90.0
	present	1.00	5	10.0
HYPER-ACTIVITY/LEARNING DISABILITIES	not present	.00	44	88.0
	present	1.00	6	12.0
LOW SELF-ESTEEM/NARCISSISM	not present	.00	44	88.0
	present	1.00	6	12.0

Table 3 showed that anti-social personality traits were present in 5 of 50 articles, hyperactivity/learning disabilities were present in 6 of 50 articles, and low self esteem/narcissism was present in 6 of 50 articles. The total number of articles where the Psychological Factors were present is 17 of 50. The total percent is 34% of the articles.

According to the frequency distribution tables, there was a difference between family factors, which was present in 38 of 50 articles or in 76% of the articles, and social factors, which were present in 28 of 50 articles or 56% of the articles. There was a difference between family factors and psychological factors, which were present in 17 of 50 articles or 34% of the articles. There was the least difference between social factors and psychological factors.

TABLE 4: Frequency of Presence of Three Major Factors

	TOTAL FREQUENCY	TOTAL PERCENT
FAMILY FACTORS	38	76.0
SOCIAL FACTORS	28	56.0
PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS	17	34.0

The null hypothesis is that family factors will not have the most significant effects on violent and homicidal behavior in adolescents. Cross tabulation was used to determine the significance of the relationship between the three family variables and the six other variables. Pearson's R measured the value and significance for each relationship.

The relationship between the family variable - physical abuse and the three social variables of school/peers/neighborhood, media exposure and gun availability follows:

TABLE 5: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and School/Peers/Neighborhood

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Social-School/Peers/Neighborhood (SSPN)

	Count	SSPN Not Present	SSPN Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	24	10	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	15	1	16 32.0
	Column Total	39 78.0	11 22.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 3.520

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	3.40138	1	.06514

With a minimum expected frequency of 3.520, a degree of freedom of (1), and significance was low at .06514, there is no significant difference between variables. The school/peers/neighborhood variable was present in a total of 11 articles, physical abuse was present in a total of 16 articles.

TABLE 6: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and Media Exposure

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Social-Media Exposure (SME)

	Count	SME Not Present	SME Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	30	4	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	13	3	16 32.0
	Column Total	43 86.0	7 14.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 2.240

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.44093	1	.50667

With a minimum expected frequency of 2.240, a degree of freedom of (1), the significance was .50667. This relationship appears significant for the purpose of this study. The media exposure variable was present in a total of seven articles, while physical abuse was present in 16 articles.



TABLE 7: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and Gun Availability

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Social-Gun Availability (SGA)

	Count	SGA Not Present	SGA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	27	7	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	13	3	16 32.0
	Column Total	40 80.0	10 20.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 3.200

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.02298	1	.87951

With a minimum expected frequency of 3.200, and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance was .87951, there is no significant difference between variables. The gun availability variable was present in a total of 10 articles, while the physical abuse was present in a total of 16 articles.

The relationship between family variable - physical abuse and the three psychological factors of hyperactivity/learning disabilities, low self-esteem, and anti-social personality traits follows:

TABLE 8: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and Hyperactivity/Learning Disabilities

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Psychological-Hyperactivity (PSYH)

	Count	PSYH Not Present	PSYH Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	30	4	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	14	2	16 32.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.920

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.00557	1	.94051

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.920 and a degree of freedom of (1), the significance was .94051. This relationship appears significant. The hyperactivity/learning disability variable was present in a total of six articles compared to physical abuse present in a total of 16 articles.

TABLE 9: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and Low Self Esteem

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Psychological-Low Self Esteem (PSYL)

	Count	PSYL Not Present	PSYL Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	31	3	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	13	3	16 32.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.920

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	1.01521	1	.31366

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.920 and a degree of freedom (1), the significance was .31366. This relationship appears significant. The low self-esteem variable was present in a total of six articles compared to physical abuse being present in a total of 16 articles.

TABLE 10: Relationship Between Family Physical Abuse and Anti-Social Personality Traits

Family Abuse (FAA) by  
Psychological-Antisocial Behavior (PSA)

	Count	PSA Not Present	PSA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAA Not Present	.00	29	5	34 68.0
FAA Present	1.00	16		16 32.0
	Column Total	45 90.0	5 10.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.600

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	1.01521	1	.10590

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.600 and a degree of freedom (1), the significance was .10590. This relationship appears significant. The antisocial personality traits variable was present in five articles compared to physical abuse being present in 16 articles.

The relationship between the family variable - neglect, and the three social variables - school/neighborhood/peers, media exposure and gun availability follows:

TABLE 11: Relationship Between Neglect and  
School/Peers/Neighborhood

Neglect (FAN) by  
Social-School/Peers/Neighborhood (SSPN)

	Count	SSPN Not Present	SSPN Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	27	8	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	12	3	15 30.0
	Column Total	39 78.0	11 22.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 3.300

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.04995	1	.82315

With a minimum expected frequency of 3.300 and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .82315, there is no significant difference between variables. The school/peers/neighborhood variable was present in a total of 11 articles, compared to neglect being present in a total of 15 articles.

TABLE 12: Relationship Between Neglect and Media Exposure

Neglect (FAN) by  
Social-Media Exposure (SME)

	Count	SME Not Present	SME Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	30	5	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	13	2	15 30.0
	Column Total	43 86.0	7 14.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 2.100

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.00791	1	.92913

With a minimum expected frequency of 2.100 and a degree of freedom of (1), the significance was .92913. This relationship appears significant. The media exposure variable was present in a total of seven articles compared to the neglect variable being present in 15 articles.

TABLE 13: Relationship Between Neglect and Gun Availability

Neglect (FAN) by  
Social-Gun Availability (SGA)

	Count	SGA Not Present	SGA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	29	6	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	11	4	15 30.0
	Column Total	40 80.0	10 20.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 3.000

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.59524	1	.44040

With a minimum expected frequency of 3.000, and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .44040, there is no significant difference between variables. The gun availability variable was present in a total of 10 articles compared to the neglect variable being present in 15 articles.

The relationship between family variable - neglect and the three psychological variables - hyperactivity/ learning disabilities, low self-esteem, and anti-social personality traits follows:

TABLE 14: Relationship Between Neglect and  
Hyperactivity/Learning Disabilities

Neglect (FAN) by  
Psychological-Hyperactivity (PSYH)

	Count	PSYH Not Present	PSYH Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	31	4	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	13	2	15 30.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.800

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.03608	1	.84936

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.800 and a degree of freedom of (1), the significance was .84936. This relationship appears significant. The hyperactivity/learning disability variable was present in six articles compared to neglect being present in 15 articles.



TABLE 15: Relationship Between Neglect and  
Low Self Esteem

Neglect (FAN) by  
Psychological-Low Self Esteem (PSYL)

	Count	PSYL Not Present	PSYL Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	32	3	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	12	3	15 30.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.800

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	1.29870	1	.25445

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.800 and a degree of freedom (1), the significance was .25445. This relationship appears significant. The low self-esteem variable was present in six articles compared to neglect variable being present in 15 articles.

TABLE 16: Relationship Between Neglect and  
Anti-Social Personality Traits

Neglect (FAN) by  
Psychological-Antisocial Behavior (PSA)

	Count	PSA Not Present	PSA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAN Not Present	.00	31	4	35 70.0
FAN Present	1.00	14	1	15 30.0
	Column Total	45 90.0	5 10.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.500

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.26455	1	.60701

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.500 and a degree of freedom (1), the significance was .60701. This relationship appears significant. The antisocial personality traits variable was present in five articles compared to the variable neglect being present in 15 articles.

The relationship between the family variable - psychological/alcohol and drug abuse and the three social variables - peers/school/neighborhood, media exposure and gun availability follows:

TABLE 17: Relationship Between Family Psychological and School/Peers/Neighborhood

Drug & Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Social-School/Peers/Neighborhood (SSPN)

	Count	SSPN Not Present	SSPN Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	32	11	43 86.0
FAP Present	1.00	7		7 14.0
	Column Total	39 78.0	11 22.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.540

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	2.29577	1	.12973

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.540 and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .12973, there is no significant difference between variable. The alcohol and drug abuse variable was present in seven articles compared to the school/peers/neighborhood variable being present in 11 articles. This is the first time that a family variable appeared fewer times in the articles than a social variable.

TABLE 18: Relationship Between Family Psychological and Media Exposure

Drug and Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Social-Media Exposure (SME)

	Count	SME Not Present	SME Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	36	7	43 86.0
FAN Present	1.00	7		7 14.0
	Column Total	43 86.0	7 14.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = .980

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	1.32504	1	.24969

With a minimum expected frequency of .980 and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .24969, there is no significant difference between variables. This is the first time that a family variable and a social variable were present in the same number (seven) of articles.

TABLE 19: Relationship Between Family Psychological and Gun Availability

Drug and Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Social-Gun Availability (SGA)

	Count	SGA Not Present	SGA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	35	8	43 86.0
FAP Present	1.00	5	2	7 14.0
	Column Total	40 80.0	10 20.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = 1.400

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.37375	1	.54097

With a minimum expected frequency of 1.400, and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .54097, there is no significant difference between variables. The gun availability variable was present in 10 articles compared to the psychological/alcohol and drug abuse factor which was present in seven articles. This is the second time in this study that a social variable has been present in more articles than a family variable.

The relationship between the family variable - psychological/drug and alcohol abuse and the three psychological variables - hyperactivity/learning disabilities, low self-esteem, and anti-social personality traits follows:

TABLE 20: Relationship Between Family Psychological and Hyperactivity/Learning Disabilities

Drug and Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Psychological-Hyperactivity (PSYH)

	Count	PSYH Not Present	PSYH Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	38	5	43 86.0
FAN Present	1.00	6	1	7 14.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = .840

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.04027	1	.84095

With a minimum expected frequency of .840 and a degree of freedom of (1), and significance of .84095, there was no significant difference between variables. The hyperactivity/learning disability variable was present in six articles compared to psychological/alcohol and drug abuse being present in seven articles.

TABLE 21: Relationship Between Family Psychological and Low Self Esteem

Drug and Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Psychological-Low Self Esteem (PSYL)

	Count	PSYL Not Present	PSYL Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	38	5	43 86.0
FAN Present	1.00	6	1	7 14.0
	Column Total	44 88.0	6 12.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = .840

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.04027	1	.84095

With a minimum expected frequency of .840 and a degree of freedom (1), and significance of .84095, there was no significant difference between variables. The low self esteem variable was present in six articles compared to the psychological/alcohol and drug abuse variable being present in seven articles.

TABLE 22: Relationship Between Family Psychological and Anti-Social Personality Traits

Drug and Alcohol Abuse (FAP) by  
Psychological-Antisocial Behavior (PSA)

	Count	PSA Not Present	PSA Present	Row Total
		.00	1.00	
FAP Not Present	.00	38	5	43 86.0
FAP Present	1.00	7		7 14.0
	Column Total	45 90.0	5 10.0	50 100.0

Minimum Expected Frequency = .700

Chi-Square	Value	DF	Significance
Pearson	.90439	1	.34161

With a minimum expected frequency of .700 and a degree of freedom (1), and significance of .34161, there was no significant difference between variables. The antisocial personality traits variable was present in five articles compared to the variable psychological/alcohol and drug abuse being present in seven articles.

The relationship between the family psychological/alcohol and drug abuse variables and psychological variables - hyperactivity/learning disability, low self-esteem and anti-social personality traits had the most significance to accept the null hypothesis.



Since all family variables had a total presence of 38, compared to a presence of 28 social variables and 17 psychological variables, the null hypothesis is accepted.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The way we treat our children can have devastating repercussions for them, for us and for society at large. Violence is an expensive enterprise that erodes the very foundation of society. Part of that expense lies in the fact that children who become violent are prone toward poor health, drug abuse, marital instability, and severe employment problems.<sup>1</sup>

The study revealed that of the nine variables predicted to have some causative factor with violence and homicide among adolescents, the three variables listed under family factors had the most significant relationship. Of the three family variables, abuse had the most significant relationship, neglect was the next highest and parents' alcohol and drug abuse was the lowest. Two variables listed under social factors rated higher than parents drug and alcohol use, these were effects of peers, neighborhood and school, and availability of guns. A third social variable was exposure to violence in the media; this variable measured lowest of all social factors. Psychological factors were found to have the least significant influence

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<sup>1</sup>Ann Goetting, "Violence as a Consequence of Parenting," Trends, Risks and Interventions in Lethal Violence: Proceedings of the Third Annual Spring Symposium of the Homicide Research Working Group; Atlanta, Georgia, (1995), pp. 10-18.

on violence. Low self-esteem and learning disabilities, such as attention deficit disorder / hyperactivity disorder, were mentioned in six out of 49 articles. Anti-social personality disorder was emphasized in five of 49 articles.

The significance of the relationship between family factors and adolescent violence demonstrates that in most reported incidents of violence and/or murder, the juvenile offender has a history of living in an abusive family. The low score of the relationship between psychological factors and adolescent violence was surprising. It would seem that of the adolescents who become involved in violent activities, all must suffer from poor coping skills resulting from learning disabilities and resulting in low self-esteem and anti-social behavior. Along with the family environment, the social or community environment has the next strongest relationship to violence among adolescents. Behavior that is modeled and reinforced is what most youthful offenders are demonstrating. The topic of the availability of guns is appalling. Though there are alleged regulations and restrictions, if a kid wants a gun badly enough, he'll get one.

One finding that bears mentioning is that even though each variable was measured separately, all overlapped in varying degrees. The family factors of abuse, neglect and substance abuse can each stand alone in terms of damaging effects on children, they frequently occur simultaneously.

Neglect, which is a form of abuse, occurs frequently when the parent or parents are abusing drugs or alcohol. Alcohol and drugs have been shown to decrease inhibitions and tolerance in those with an explosive temperament, often leading to a physically abusive situation between parents or parents and children. Social factors can be linked to family factors. Due to a low socioeconomic status, a family may have to live in a neighborhood where violence is more prominent. This can also be a source of stress for parents, causing them to sometimes work two or three jobs in hopes of moving their family, or to abuse alcohol and drugs to reduce stress. Either option's end result is a potential situation of neglect. Neglect may also contribute to a child's psychological well-being; they need to be reassured and taught effective coping skills. If a parent is unavailable, the child may not get very basic needs met.

Finally, this study confirmed that there are some real issues of parenting and responsibility of the adult world that need to be addressed. Very few murderers or violent children are just born that way. Most are responding to their environment. The grown-ups in charge need to re-evaluate their behavior and the message they're giving the children.

#### Limitations of the Study

There is a limited body of literature that addresses specifically the connection between abuse and neglect and

violent behavior. Most of the research focuses on parenting factors as a cause of delinquency, and a good part of that related specifically to the child maltreatment - delinquency connection. The empirical causal connections between parenting and violent behavior remain ambiguous and equivocal.<sup>2</sup>

The sources of ambiguity lie with several considerations. One relates to the complex and multidimensional nature of both violent behavior and of parenting. There are many different kinds of violent behavior and many dimensions of parenting. The concern here is that some particular measures of violent behavior may relate to some particular measures of parenthood, but not to others. Different studies use different measures of violent behavior and of parenting.<sup>3</sup>

Another limitation of the study is comparing data from different sources because each may vary in the bias of their particular research. The sources of articles used in this study ranged from social work journals to books on child psychiatry to articles in mainstream magazines.

Delinquency studies may come from official records or from self-reported information. Certain variables may not be recorded in either of these instances. A criminal report

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<sup>2</sup>A. Goetting, "Violence as a Consequence of Parenting."

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

may not need to include history of family violence. Self report may be edited due to fear on the part of the child.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Clearly more research is needed on processes that lead to violent behavior. Studies should include children of different ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to investigate the long term and psychological effects of being victimized by or exposed to violence. Evaluation is needed of the cumulative effects of repeated exposure, effects of severity of exposure, and the child's familiarity with the victim or perpetrator.'

By increasing one's knowledge about factors related to youth violence, more effective prevention efforts can be developed. Current prevention efforts need to be evaluated for effectiveness. This information will also be helpful in training professionals who work with children and families.

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'A. Goetting, "Violence as a Consequence of Parenting."

## CHAPTER SIX

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Addressing juvenile violence and homicide is complicated and multifaceted. The responsibility lies with parents, educators, community and legislators. With the increase of violent, random acts in the community and schools, an interdisciplinary approach is essential if control and prevention are to be achieved. While individual policies and institutions have not been influential in controlling violence, the diversity offered by state and local government, community and professional agencies could constructively undertake the issues enveloping violence.<sup>1</sup>

Youth can be taught skills to help them deal with violent situations. They can be helped to develop the self esteem needed to solve differences without violence. Young people can be taught about the situations or actions that are likely to result in violence or violent injuries, such as associating with violent peers, using alcohol or drugs, and possessing a firearm. They can be provided with mentors or special teachers who can serve as role models. Laws and regulations can be developed specifically to reduce injuries and deaths, such as stronger laws governing the use, ownership and sale of guns. Abused children and bored or

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Rosenberg and Mary Ann Fenley, Violence in America: A Public Health Approach, New York: Oxford University Press, (1991).

wayward teenagers can be provided with training, support and recreation.<sup>2</sup>

Improving parenting skills through specifically designed classes for parents can improve how the parent and child interact. The improvement in this relationship may reduce the risk of childhood behavior problems and subsequent antisocial behavior that may predispose an individual to violence later in life. Programs targeted toward parents must address the psychological needs of the parents, especially their sense of being competent parents; the parental behaviors that influence the physical and social development of their children; and the stresses and social supports that can either help or hinder parents' ability to adapt to their children's needs.<sup>3</sup>

Prevention of violence must also be a common goal of community members. Community resolution programs have decreased violence in a number of states and school districts. It is an important aspect of the multi-dimensional approach required to address the complexities surrounding violence. The role of the community, police and

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<sup>2</sup>National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, The Prevention of Youth Violence: A Framework for Community Action; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Georgia, (1993), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 15.



youth is important in the sustainability of the programs directed at "taking back the neighborhoods."<sup>4</sup>

Social support and life skills training are a means of involving communities and support groups with children and adolescents. School-based health clinics, mentoring, home visiting programs, church related activities, and unconventional school schedules can assist in the control of violence. Not only do parents look to the schools for assistance in the educational and social development of their children, communities will eventually reflect the success of a school's attempt to educate youth about alternatives to violence.<sup>5</sup>

Conflict resolution and mediation in the schools as a matter of peer-involvement, teacher in-service training and parent involvement have proven effective in numerous school systems. The use of conflict resolution in an educational setting calls for a commitment by educational administrators and teachers to examine their reaction to conflict. teachers require both technical and resource support in the families and communities if these techniques are to succeed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>M.A. DuPont-Morales, "Violence: Comprehension Before Intervention--Understanding and Preventing Violence (Vol. 1); Saving Youth from Violence," Public Administration Review, Vol. 55 No. 1, (1995), pp.121-124.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

The profession of social work must be aware of the multitude of ways it can impact the issue of violence. As educators, social workers can work with parents to teach effective parenting skills. Parental education about child abuse and neglect should be effectuated both directly, through courses for parents, and indirectly, by educating children who might be in abusive situations.<sup>7</sup> Social workers can act as counselors, in the schools, institutions and private sector to offer guidance and support for those touched by violence. On a macro level, social workers can work with neighborhoods and communities to provide education support and opportunities for positive social interactions, such as after school programs and mentoring programs. School social workers can provide education and counseling to students who are subject to violence. Social workers can also act as advocates for stronger gun control laws and for other legislation to support parents who are trying to work to support their families and need adequate child care or time off to care for their families without risking their job. Caring for children is the responsibility of the adults with whom they have direct and indirect contact.

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<sup>7</sup>Kathleen Heide, "Why Kids Keep Killing: The Correlates, Causes and Challenges of Juvenile Homicide," Stanford Law and Policy Review, Vol. 7 No. 1, (1996), pp. 43-48.

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